

Distance Education Courses for Public Elementary and Secondary School

Students: 2002-03

<http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2005010>

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The National Center for Education Statistics has just released this report on distance education at public elementary and secondary schools. NCES reports usually have high response rates and this one is no exception - 94 percent of 2,305 public school districts. The study will be of particular interest to colleges because it looks at the number of students who are taking advanced placement courses at a distance.

Summary: This public school district survey is the first national survey to explore distance education courses for public elementary and secondary school students. The report provides national estimates of the number of districts and schools with students enrolled in distance education courses, as well as the number of enrollments in those courses. In addition, it examines the reported reasons for having distance education courses, the instructional level of the populations served, entities delivering the courses to students, and data pertaining to online courses. Data about curriculum areas and technology in distance education courses are also discussed. Survey findings are presented at the national level and by school district characteristics such as metropolitan status, district enrollment size, region, and poverty concentration.

Here are a few of the findings that Chris Mullins thought particularly interesting.

- During the 2002-03 12-month school year, about one-third of public school districts (36 percent) had students in the district enrolled in distance education courses (table 1). This represents an estimated 5,500 out of a total of 15,040 public school districts.

- An estimated 8,200 public schools had students enrolled in distance education courses during the 2002-03 12-month school year (table 2). This represents approximately 9 percent of all public schools nationwide (table 3).

- Fifty percent of the districts with students enrolled in distance education courses had students enrolled in Advanced Placement or college-level courses offered through distance education in 2002-03 (table 9). This represents an estimated 2,700 districts.

- There were an estimated 45,300 enrollments in Advanced Placement or college-level courses offered through distance education in 2002-03 (table 10). This represents 14 percent of the total enrollments in distance education.

- More districts reported two-way interactive video (55 percent) or Internet courses using asynchronous computer-based instruction (47 percent) than Internet courses using synchronous computer-based instruction (21 percent), one-way prerecorded video (16 percent), or some other technology (4 percent) as a primary mode of delivery (table 11).⁵

- The reason most frequently cited as very important for having distance education courses in the district was offering courses not otherwise available at the school (80 percent) (table 18). Other reasons frequently cited as very important were meeting the needs of specific groups of students (59 percent) and offering Advanced Placement or college-level courses (50 percent). Reducing scheduling conflicts for students was mentioned as very important by 23 percent of districts. The remaining reasons were listed as very important by 4 to 17 percent of districts.

- Seventy-two percent of districts with students enrolled in distance education courses planned to expand their distance education courses in the future (table 20). No differences were detected by district characteristics in plans to expand distance education courses.

- Costs were cited as a major factor more often than any other factor as preventing districts from expanding their distance education courses (table 21). Thirty-six percent of districts that were planning to expand their distance education courses selected course development and/or purchasing costs as a major factor preventing their expansion (table 21).

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